

"The Illogical Cafe of Thunderous Chaos, Ep.2: Leaving Reality"
by Nathaniel Torres

**"The Illogical Cafe of Thunderous Chaos:
Episode 2: Leaving Reality"**
A Story by N.Torres based on Scripts by N.Torres
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1) The Team spies on the Silver Meanies



2) Grimmie attacks a White Torpedo on a bike

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Version 21

This work contains some
adult language and violence.
Parental discretion is advised.

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QUOTE:

From The Cult Crime Series:

"POLICE IN WORRISOME PURSUIT"

(Now going into its 25th season)

"Who's that hot babe in the RED high heels, Hubba-hubba?!"

"That's my MALE partner, you moron. We're going undercover tonight as husband and wife. We're gonna try and nail that serial purse snatcher."

"Where will she be working? Can I come along? Walla-walla!"

"I am going to kick your ass!"

"Wubba-wubba!"

(Indy-Team's favorite
Helmet audio program)

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A Prologue

A wild and violent brawl between the members of Indy-Team inside Cryopus Base's Cafeteria had caused them to bond like nothing else possibly could. It was strange to Rikers, the Project's Head Leader, how these Soldiers could find ways of fixing their disagreements, or repairing old hostilities with a simple no-holds-barred fist-fight. Another aspect of the base they utilized to resolve their issues was the gymnasium, mostly its cement wall with worn down stripes and one evil-looking black ball. They let off a lot of steam playing crazy games in there.

The Team which consisted of four Square-Uniformed Independent Soldiers named Rager, Callwell, Bolson and Blast, hadn't really been duty-activated, not exactly. They were not technically called Active-Protectors unless a combat situation arose. Then and only then would they have an Official Project License, or the Clearance for Active-Destruction, to commit any severe ultra-violence. They could not receive top-pay unless they were truly called to commit evil thuggie actions in the name of company-progress. A mere brawl between them in the Cafe was no suitable qualification for higher pay. But then nothing had really gone wrong at Cryopus Base, at least not yet.

When Rikers finally got the call that the second Team would begin working in the immediate area, his advice to that Team's Commander was to keep a very low profile, as in please be altogether non-existent. Rikers' own Team didn't need to know that another aspect of The Project was up to something secretive anywhere near home base. Then came the report from Rager, who seemed to have taken upon himself the responsibility of being the Leader of the Four Unif-Soldiers entrusted with the protection of Cryopus Base. This Rager had been talking a mere walk on the surface above their below-ground-base-encampment, when he had seen a hover-bike speeding across the desert heading toward the nearby canyons to the East. What was Rikers to say, when he wasn't allowed to say anything? "Let this one go," he

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told the Square-Uniformed Soldier. "Please, Rager," he begged. "let it go."

"Yeah, sure," Rager said. "Whatever you say, boss."

Rager had turned and walked out of his office. But Rikers knew the Soldier was not about to let it go, no more than the Soldier would let any possible threat go un-investigated. No way in hell. A long, terrible, vacation in hell always seemed inevitable with these Square-Unif-types.

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The Canyon

So mankind had reached the stars after so many years of trying and failing, but when he finally got there, he had taken something with him that he could not possibly leave behind, because it was nailed to his insides... Stupidity.

Two humans in Square-Armor-Uniforms, Soldiers from Cryopus Base, were crawling slowly up the side of a steep hill, at night, during a thick fog, as if they were moving through tall grass in a jungle, wishing they could activate the built-in flashlights in the flat palms of their flat Unif-Suits. They stopped to rest for a moment to listen for any sounds before they proceeded, remaining face-down on the sandy ground, not rising for fear of being spotted by the enemy.

"Maybe," said Rager, a Soldier in a purple-Square-Unif, with abstract dark-purple designs here and there, "this is some kind of clue as to why we were hired to work at this stupid place?"

"You're never going to stop wondering, are you?" said Callwell, his accomplice in night-time insubordination.

Months had passed and there had been no information forthcoming from those who were their employers, no sign of a mission, no reasons for why the Team were on planet Cryopus. In fact they had never even met their employers. The only person they could connect with the company was the arrogant, paint-by-the-numbers, Project Manager that went by the name of Rikers, if that was even his real name - since no one was absolutely certain about anything, who never wore the required helmet, and claimed to be an Independent, which sounded like an insulting joke to the Team. They had never heard of him before taking on this secret Project. This red-haired butt-hole of a man had a pretentious beard that forced his face to become simply and irresistibly smack-able! And if it wasn't for the decent paychecks, the okay food, the smart-beds that adjusted automatically to your every sleeping need, and the overall basic

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"super-comfort-feel" of the base, every single one of them would have stood in line to smack him a few times, and then returned to the back of the line for more unending excitement; and that every night right before the Kitchen-Bot served coffee and crackers. A little night-time entertainment never hurt... the slappers that is.

They had been told like so many of the Square-Suit-Clan-Soldier persuasion are told, to wear the Square-Armor faithfully because statistics proved the Suits prolonged life during stressful conflicts, provided overall bodily-health and inner-happiness, improved physical comfort, lessened the pain of physical impacts, decreased the chance of broken bones, and made one free from immediate personal identification. The jobs usually paid real well - hey, where the hell do I sign up? And besides it was, in and of, itself a portable shower and a handy water-purifying-system. In fact, what protected them was a proprietary-liquid-system, an internal rubber wet-suit, and lots of built-in high-tech miniature computer technology, from the tops of their Square heads to the bottom of their Square feet. Usually you joined a Clan where everyone wore the same color. But when it came to the Indy-teams, they got to decorate their Suits with whatever colors they desired. This meant you belonged to a Team that was known for thinking for itself, not always following orders, and were usually some kick-ass hombres not to be messed with. And they wore that badge of anger proudly.

As for Cryopus's Indy-Team, their very job description could fit on one side of a small business card. They were to keep a look out for any sign of danger, to defend the Base from any attackers and/or intruders. They were to, usually, simply start shooting first and ask questions later, if things ever got "dangerously-dangerous." Their contract actually utilized this absurd and vague double-phrase, "dangerously-dangerous," which could be interpreted any number of ways. Does abusing the word twice make sure the idea would be actually comprehended? No. In fact any interpretable or re-interpretable phrases whatsoever would be entirely left for some future judge and jury to decide in a court of law, depending on the kinds of damage caused, who had survived to tell of any particular catastrophe, who was being paid off to find the Soldier(s) innocent of all charges, and what any witness(es) to whatever crimes were going to say on the subject of any courtly-debate, depending on whether he/they was/were threatened to keep silent, or if they fully planned on

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telling the truth and not accepting any bribes, would at risk of eventually disappearing, and as it sometimes happened, during the actual trial itself.

And who would ask anything reasonable of a non-descriptive, unidentifiable, Square-Uniformed, trigger-happy Soldier-for-hire, but for him to fire upon anything at all that seemed rudely out-of-place? He would have only been defending himself based on whatever little information he was given. Normally the official staff of any Project was told to stay clear of Unifs, and most of the staffs usually remembered to heed this good piece of advice. Likewise, the enemies of Unifs, that is other Unif-Clans, tended to stay clear of one another as well, and in most constructive ways, unless, of course, they were hell-bent on annihilating each other.

The present-job, whatever it was, would be over, of course, when the reason for their presence at a Project Location was completed, even if they had never had the opportunity to get involved in any personal (that is violent) way. They could either go home to relax, or move on to another job, depending on how little they complained on the previous one, with most likely no idea what the purpose of next job was either!

The Independent-Unifs working on Cryopus did have their suspicions, but imaginative personal theories as to what the job might be, no matter what excellent conversation material it made during breakfast, lunch, dinner, and illegal midnight snack raids on the base's kitchen (all of which Rikers pretended never happened), was not good enough. Loss of sleep was common and few were strong enough to keep that particular intruder at a distance for very long. General lack of information caused in the mind a desperate need to know, to understand, to solve the mystery at hand, and also forced a deep-rooted longing for some kind of violent battle, or anti-social confrontation that might perhaps explain the situation, and, hopefully, release the Soldier from any severe doubts and the constant insanity-provoking uncertainties.

Callwell, the only female in the group of four Independent-Soldiers seemed the most content of them all. She had painted her Square-Armor with pink and white designs, so she stood out like an out-of-breath Rhino that had escaped a zoo and found its way onto the dance floor of a high school prom filled with terrified youngsters. Rager hoped he wouldn't have to go into battle with her at his side, he would have to witness her die

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rather quickly. He had often asked her to change her color-scheme, but her answer always was, "No. Most women's favorite color is pink, I can be nothing more than what I really am." "Look at me," he once said, "I'm dark purple, in the night-time I'm a bruise on a tree's ass." "Which makes no damn sense, Rager, by the way," she responded, "but, I do get your point, I'm a walking target, yes, I know. But, hey, you're forgetting something important, during a daylight mission you're as exposed as I am." "Night mission," He said, "that's the only way to go> No point in attacking during the day-light, you can die way too easily." "A day mission is all you have if daylight is when they send you to go out and fight!" "There's no arguing with you, woman," he said. "Who the hell in their right mind is going to send an easy-to-locate Purple-Unif like me to go fight in the daylight? The mission will fail. I wear this color so they won't send me on any stupid suicide missions!" "Who would send you? Uhh, someone who doesn't care whether you live or die?" "At least the enemy will waste his first bullets bringing you down, you walking, pink, advertisement for silly persons." "And you? Playing things safe will never get you a purple medal." "Holy cow, she tells jokes!"

They both paused to collect their thoughts.

Callwell changed the mood and the subject. "Listen," she said, "I don't mind sneaking around in the dark. It makes me feel like I'm finally doing something exciting. But if we get caught making this unauthorized excursion, we could get booted from this mission."

"There's something unexplained going on here that could affect us all. Rikers is not talking to us as usual - even after I gave him my report! If he expects me to sit around here doing nothing, while something potentially dangerous is going on nearby, he can fire me any time he wants! If we get caught, we simply raise our hands and identify ourselves. We give them no reason to be offended by our lack of cooperation. I'm not trying to start a War of the Worlds, I'm just looking for some answers."

"Did you tell the others we were coming here?" she asked.

"No, just you<" Rager responded. "Looks like the others are not really on-the-ball. They haven't even noticed we sneaked out of the base."

"Somebody's coming," said Callwell.

"Stay low," advised Rager. "don't move. Maybe they'll walk

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past us in this fog."

"Unless they know exactly what to look for!" It was Rikers, their superior, the man who was handling them, or rather in the Unif-Soldiers' own opinions mis-handling them. He was officious, and loyal to whatever company he served. He didn't tell them anything the company didn't want them to know - which was truly bad form. To them he was a slimy thing. To work under him was like being the roommate of a 24-hour-a-day-comedian who was always telling you jokes but never revealing the punchlines. This causes you to hate that comedian with your whole heart and wish, deliriously, for his quick and horrible, but funny demise. Every time you see a falling star, your wish is, "Tiny tiny little star, how I wonder what you are... Die, Rikers, you worthless collection of the most smelly and disgusting of all animal entrails..."

"You'll get caught," Rikers said, giving them his most stern facial expression, an I'm in charge as long as you're working for me. "Come back with me right now, that's an order!"

Rager chuckled. Their boss must think he's talking to people who actually like him. "You've had your fun and games, Rikers. I'm not dogging around here anymore, waiting for you to throw me a bone."

"Listen to me. I will fire you. Please." Now this took Rager a bit by surprise, because Rikers rarely said please. "These guys are not to be trifled with. They will take you prisoner. And I don't know what they will do to you. Don't do this."

"Aren't you curious, Rikers?" asked Callwell. "Don't you want to see what's down there?"

Of course he was curious, but, Rikers was under orders not to say anything about anything. He was under agreement not to reveal that he was well aware of the nature of what was going on down there in the pit. He was being paid to be as silent as a corpse during a cremation. "Get back to your posts, there is no danger here but the danger you make for yourselves." He paused to see if this line of reasoning would change their minds.

"Thanks for the warning," said Callwell. Now she was really curious. If there was danger, was Rikers putting himself in great danger by trying to convince them to return to base? That would mean he actually cared what happened to them; on the other hand it could also mean he simply didn't want to lose his job.

The pause in their conversation told Rikers all he needed

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to know. The Soldiers were not budging, they were going to stay on the ground and keep crawling until they reached the edge of the cliff and looked into the canyon below to their own self-satisfaction.

"Fine. I'm leaving. I'm not a part of this. This is illegal and in violation of your contracts and will go down in your records as insubordination."

Someone else was coming towards them through the fog. The Unif-Soldier with yellow as the prominent color of his face-plate was called Blast. Now everyone wondered if that was actually his real name or a nickname, but he was under no obligation to reveal the true aspects of that information. The only one who might truly know the answer to that was Rikers, and well, he never gave out any answers.

"Blast," said Rikers, "get back to the base!"

"What's going on?" asked Blast.

Rikers turned and looked at the two Soldiers lying on the ground. "Trouble. Big trouble. I'm leaving. Goodbye."

"What about them?" Blast was genuinely confused. What had just transpired between these people. Why was the Head of Project abandoning his Soldiers there on the sand, in the darkness, in the fog?

"Them?" said Rikers. "They're stubborn and their stupid."

Another figure came out of the fog. It was Bolson, the last of the Team hired to protect the base. Bolson's primary face-plate color was green.

"How could I fall for that? Nobody picnics in the dark and the fog! Damn you, Blast! You're a liar!"

"Lower your voice. Enemy combatants," said Rikers.

Rager was speaking now, "They're not enemies! They're us, they belong to our company, don't they? And if they are enemy, who are they exactly? Red Tornado? Black Nova? Silver Meanie? The Crawling Slime? White Torpedo? Why are we just letting them dig-in and do anything they want? What if they're planning to attack us?"

"It doesn't matter who they are or why they are here. You're dead if they catch you spying on them. I can tell you that much. They will show you no mercy no matter who you are. Hell, they would show me no mercy either."

During the back-and-forth, no one had noticed that Callwell had slipped away, crawled to the edge of the cliff, spied the canyon below, and was now returning at a fast crawl over to

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them, excited, and out of breath. "Come on! You guys gotta see this! It's really cool!"

Blast and Bolson got down on their knees and crawled to where Rager was already himself quickly slithering closer to the edge of the cliff. All four were now looking down into the pit.

Fork-lifts were lugging large crates towards the mouth of a mine where the crates were then dropped. Soldiers would lift and carry the crates through and into the mouth of the mine. The workers were Silver Meanies, a clan of Square-Unifs that would do anything unethical for the right price. The headlights from their resting hover-bikes illuminated the darkness of the canyon, giving it a strange yellowish-green glow. The Meanies were like ants, working fast and furious. The leader was barking orders and they obeyed his every command immediately, like they all had an urgent purpose which had to be accomplished now now now. A large truck was coming down the road towards the mine carrying a mysterious object covered by a large aluminum tarp.

"Let's go down and take a closer look," said Callwell, but she knew the answer would be no, their own Colorful Square-Indy-Unifs would give them away.

Rager would have given anything but his life to go down there and take a look around. "I said I was curious, I'm not stupid. There's no reason to go down while they are here. We wait until they're all gone. Then we go and inspect the area."

"We don't know exactly what they're doing, or how long its going to take. Someone has to keep coming back here to check on their progress." Bolson was just being reasonable. You can't predict what you must do if you don't have the right information or the right opportunities or the right volunteer.

Blast suddenly pointed, "I think they have a Mine-Seal, look! What else could it be?"

The large truck was unloading a large fork-lift, and in the lift's grasp, was a large roundish object.

Bolson gaped in awe at the sight. He'd see them only in photographs, but hoped one day he would see one in person. "Whatever is in those crates, they want it all locked up forever. Mine-Seals release heavy-duty levels of radiation I wouldn't send my worst ex-girlfriend to go anywhere near."

The rate of Rager's breathing was increasing. He was nervous. And he didn't like anyone making him nervous. That made him angry. And when angry he was ready for a fight. Going down there and beating up a few Silver Meanies was sounding more and

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more like a very good way to greet the sunrise, which wasn't, by the way, too far off.

"That thing is going to be activated near our shelter," said Callwell. "Is it going to affect our standard of living?" She was getting nervous too.

Rager began sliding back down the sandy hill. "I wouldn't buy a house anywhere near this place for say ten thousand years. I wouldn't live here if they gave me a house for free. This area is gonna be a dead-zone. Will be for a very long time. Awful gizmos like that collect solar energy and convert it into high levels of lethal radiation. That's the appeal. That's why they chose a mine that faces the rising sun. S.O.B. Where's the hell is Rikers?"

"He bolted," said Callwell, meaning she saw him run off and disappear into the fog.

"He's a coward," said Bolton.

"No," said Rager. "He's not a coward. He's one of them. Let's get outta here before he calls in the clowns."

"He would do that to us?" asked Blast. "Betray us?"

"I don't trust him," said Rager.

"Maybe it's that you just don't like him," said Callwell.

"That too."

They crawled away downhill and disappeared into the fog. They had had enough. The sun would be coming up soon. They had to become invisible. Get back underground. But they were not exactly invisible enough.

Rikers stood on a nearby hill with motion-detector goggles over his eyes, watching his Team move across the sand. He spoke to his superiors using his ear-set communicator, "They're moving away now. No need to send in a strike Team. It's not a big problem, they were just curious, they're not stupid enough to cause any real trouble. Things will be okay if we are fair with them. No arrests. Well, you wanted men with initiative, what did you expect? You can't expect a Soldier to act like a scared puppy and hide under a bed whenever he senses trouble. Kill them? There's no need to! They're going back to base! Like I said they are not a problem. Yes, the job will be finished soon. By noon the Seal will be in place and active. Sir, I like these guys, but they're getting antsy and there's no telling what they'll do, if they end up being in great need and we're nowhere to be found. I think a new minor-contact - not myself surely - someone else they can turn to if all of this operation goes all

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to shit. In future we can bring them back into the fold easily, back under our roof, working for us again, with not so much as a scratch to anyone's ego. Sir, can you forget about their little night-time insubordination, they're good men? I'm sorry to hear you disagree. I think you're making a mistake but then its your choice to keep everything secret since its your investment anyway. Sure, okay, maybe a sporting competition might smooth things over, help them air out their frustrations, vent some anger. But, I'll tell you something, I don't not have their trust. To them it looks like I ran-out on them when they needed me by their side. I had to, you know I had to, I couldn't let Team Two capture me. They have no knowledge of who I am. I suggest you find the guy who took his hover-bike on a joy-ride through the desert and have him removed from Silver Team. We wouldn't had had this incident if not for that dumb S.O.B. No, don't kill that insubordinate moron, just fire him and send him home on the next Passenger Ship to whatever backward planet he was born on. I have to go, sir. We'll talk again." He turned off the ear-set. "Why is it always assassination with these people? Can't they think of any other ways of dealing with problems? Incompetence! Pure incompetence! Don't they understand killing can actually makes matters worse?" Rikers walked off into the fog towards the base. "Who am I talking to?"

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The Cavern

Two Silver Meanie workers carried a large crate through a tunnel towards a large cavern, where many crates like it had been piled up on top of one another. There had to be thousands of these crates stacked on either side of the cavern, and one big row in between to walk through. But there would be no walking or inspection when they're work was done.

"This box just moved!" said one of the Silver Meanies.

"Nah, I didn't feel anything," said the second, but they had both stopped moving just in case. It was as if time had stood still and they were waiting for the clock to start up again.

"There it is again!"

"Yeah, I felt it that time!" the second Meanie spoke into his ear-set, "Commander," he said, "we have a live one."

"You have a live what?" said the Commander into his ear-set, not grasping the entire context of the Soldier's statement and coming to the obvious conclusion. What else could possibly be alive but the very reason they were there?

"Something is alive in this crate, Commander!"

"That's impossible." The Commander, worried now, was studying several possible options in his mind..

"What the hell is this planet-bizarro crap?" The first Meanie was really beginning to freak-out. The box was shaking violently, and loud, weird screeches, and angry, frustrated grunts were coming from inside it.

"Well," said the second Meanie, "whatever the hell is in this crate it's the weirdest, strangest shit I've ever heard, and it does not sound happy!"

"Is that the last box?" asked the Commander.

"Yes."

"Are you inside the tomb-chamber or outside?"

"Just outside the entrance, sir."

"Well, throw it the hell inside, close and lock the vault

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door, and get the hell out of there!"

A long, pointed, black appendage tore through the container's skin and the two Silvers allowed the large box to drop to the ground.

"What the hell is that?"

"That's titanium housing, man! Stronger material than our armor!"

"Yeah, let's go, before this thing breaks out and kills us both!"

"Soldiers? Hey!" The Commander was really worried now, no explanation of what was going on inside the mine was coming through the ear-set. "Dammit!"

The two Meanies were running for the exit. They had abandoned the vault door to the Tomb-Chamber leaving it wide open, but that was neither here nor there, meaning it wasn't important.

A belly-button-high, roundish, ugly, red-eyed, black-red-torso creature tore its way out of the metal crate with appendages that cut like slicing-knives. It looked angrily around, a bit confused because it didn't recognize its new surroundings.

"That's not the right tunnel, you idiot! Not that way, this way! This is the way out!" Their voices were echoing down through the tunnels.

The Gremmie heard their shouting and started after them, following the sounds of their voices and footsteps. The alien animal had three pointy legs and one eyeball at the front of its head and an enormous mouth. It didn't exactly look land-worthy but it was steady as it moved, and it moved quickly. If it stumbled it recovered quickly, and was quite exact in turning around corners its legs sometimes slipping like a dog turning a corner while running on linoleum tiles. The creature was adept at leaping over obstacles. It grunted like a horse with a severe sore throat, making slobbering sounds that almost sounded as if it were speaking a language. Its many long upper teeth were red, it only had upper teeth, it had no lower teeth at all, in reality Gremmies are water creatures, usually found in small ponds, and they were known for sneaking up on their prey from behind and caging them with their long red teeth, pulling them under the water so as to drown them before consuming them.

"It's coming! It's coming!" the fleeing silver Meanie taking up the rear could hear the creature's sounds becoming

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louder and louder. The Silver at the head of this limited marathon merely hoped the guy behind him was the one who got killed first.

Outside the mine, the Commander made a decision. "Seal the mine! Now!"

A forklift moved forward, as Silver Meanies pulled at the knots on the ropes holding firmly in place the aluminum tarp covering it. Soon the tarp was also sliding off and the item underneath was revealed, a large round vault door with blinking lights.

"Activate the Mine-Seal!" barked the Commander. A remote control hand-held device was handed to him; he entered a numeric code and pressed a few buttons. "That's it, there's no turning back now!"

Inside the mine the two Soldiers had almost reached the mouth of the tunnel leading outside when they saw the Seal being shoved in like a cork being returned to the neck of a wine bottle.

"No, don't leave me here!" The first Silver was close to the entrance of the cave the door and banged on Mine-Seal with his fists.

"Stop! Stop!" The second had reached the Mine-Seal. He was begging the Commander, "Open the Seal! Please! We're right here! What the hell, our ear-sets are deactivated! They're not working! Somebody turned them off! We're betrayed! We're betrayed!"

The Seal fell into position with a loud pounding noise when the forklift released its cargo and began backing away. There was a sudden hissing like an unexplainable angry steam-like release of compressed air. A monotone computer voice began announcing a numeric countdown: "Thirty, twenty-nine, twenty-eight...", etc. Numerous quick, loud and successive clicks and moaning sounds followed. The lights on the Seal started blinking more rapidly. Then the Seal's specially-designed edges expanded outward, toughing hard rock, and melted into the rocky walls surrounding it with hot-poker-red-glowing-metal and the sounds of electric-sizzling, the vibrations of which, accompanied by an loud bass-like humming sound, could be felt at feet level. It was a permanent merger of metal and rock, also accompanied by the intense smell of burning-hot, metal-rock-fusion, like a thousands of strands of hair being burnt.

A missile could surely penetrate this nuclear door yet no

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one but those on the planet and those who sent them knew any of this was even happening. No one was going to be able to presently stop them, no one human that is. High-tech robotics might be able to get inside the cavern, but as for mere humans? There would not be much of a chance of them surviving one single tour.

The two Silver Meanie Soldiers could already begin feeling their skin being burnt by the rising levels of radiation. Before long the radiation would increase to the point that the entire planet would be so irradiated as to be completely unlivable and unusable. All of Cryopus would go into some kind of highly unstable global meltdown, unfit for exploration, unfit for habitation, unfit for exploitation, unfit for most anything.

"Bastards!" The two men turned around and looked expectantly down the tunnel into the darkness as lamps began turning themselves off after a day's work. Then came the Gremmie! The creature was running towards them, huffing and puffing and anxious to kill, grunting angrily, saliva drooling out of the side of its mouth. Now, imagine the unexpected appearance of a large bat flying in circles near the ceiling of a room with a dead rat in its clutches, and in the rat's dead mouth a human finger, and on the nail of the lone, severed human appendage some green, unidentifiable, disgusting, rotting-flesh-filth. The two trapped, dying Silver Meanies screamed like little girls at a slumber party that had just been spooked by such an unexpected appearance of a flying rodent clutching its also unwelcome prey.

The Gremmie attacked and killed the two Soldiers, skewering them with its two front pointers rather quickly. Then it started tapping on the radio-active vault door to test its toughness. One might have assumed it thought it was a safe-cracker, tapping away ceremoniously on a metal bank safe, a doctor's stethoscope around its neck. Then started going at the Mine-Seal with its stabbers at high speed and with great ferocity, every blow causing an immediate dent in the hard metal.

The Silver Meanie Commander's instincts told him now was the time to get the hell out of that canyon and off-planet. "The Seal is not going to hold!" he said. "Dammit! We are getting out of here! Everybody move! Now! Damn, but he's a resilient little bugger!"

The entire Team of Silver Meanies moved quickly up the steep road as a towering Silver-Space-Vessel rose up into view

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from the other side of the hill. The vessel turned its back to them, turned its nose up, lowering its butt. A rear hatchway opened and a long ramp touched the dirt ground. The ship's landing gear would not however touch ground, they would not remain dirt-bound any longer. They would be going home. When all the workers were aboard the ramp retreated up into the belly of the craft, then rear hatch closed shut, and the ship ascended into the sky. Under the Commander's orders the White-ship's pilot was told to fly in circles around the canyon, so they could make some last minute observations, for a final report.

The Gremmie stepped backwards several feet then ran quickly forward and stabbed at the vault-door with great force. The stabbers finally penetrated the Seal, and he began cutting his way out.

"We have vault breach," said the pilot in matter-of-fact tone, showing no emotion.

The Gremmie kept hammering and cutting until there was a hole big enough for it to fit through and set itself free. It was standing there now, in the open belly of the canyon, looking around, trying to get its bearings, until it spotted the ship hovering in the sky above. It decided to concentrate on the thing in the sky.

In the cockpit the Commander shook his head with great disappointment. The Mine-Seal hadn't had enough time to get up to full strength. Now all it would do is leak useless amounts of radio-activity, but never be the full deterrent it was intended to be. "Damn, the site is compromised. Warn the company there's the danger of unauthorized inspections of the storage-facility. We're going to have to come back another day and finish this job using other methods."

"Yes, sir," said the ship's pilot. "Of course, sir."

"I see that crazy Gremmie now," said the Commander studying a monitor that offered him a good close-up image of the creature on the surface of the world below. "He sees us too, I think. Hey, he lifted up and shook one of legs at us! Did that little fucker just tell us to go screw ourselves? Arrogant little prick! Notify the Cryopus Encampment that they have an emergency Gremmie problem! That little bastard down there will find their scents and follow them all the way home."

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The Black Game

In the gymnasium two of the Square-Suited independent Soldiers were playing "Black Dodge-ball" against the gym's only stone wall. "I dare you to move closer to the wall!" Blast said to his Bolson, his opponent.

"What do I get if I catch the ball?" asked Bolson.

"Uhhhh, uhhhh. Two sets of brand new foot water-cushions." Now these water-cushions were what kept their feet from being bruised within their Square-Unifs. The game was really over when one side or the other ran out of prizes to offer, or they just got too tired and agreed to double-quit.

"Accepted! And if I lose I will give you a broken smooth-ride skateboard."

"Broken? Forget it!"

"It can be fixed if you order the parts through the company spare parts department."

"Then why didn't you fix it?"

"The receptionist there is one of my ex-girlfriends. She would just throw my order out. She does it all the time!"

"Then why do you keep on ordering?"

"Since my orders never get through I never waste any money. Besides I like bugging her, that's why I order such much as twenty things every day."

"Fine. A broken skateboard. But since the prize is shoddy I demand my second of three disables."

"Fine!"

"One arm behind your back!"

"Fine! Okay! Have it your way! But if I catch it I can make the first of three surprise demands!"

"Aw, crap. Fine! Done!"

Blast tossed the ball up into the air, backed up two feet, and did a forward body-flip, striking the ball with great force! The ball bounced off the wall at high speed and came straight for Bolson, who jumped up and caught the ball with his two legs

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and the aid of his free arm! "Yeah! In your face!" He started doing a little dance of victory in the center of the sports court.

"Dammit!" Blast was grumbling inaudibly now. "What's the surprise demand?"

"You dance around in a circle, singing the song, "I am a gorilla, I am, no, I'm not, I changed my mind!"

"What the f---! I don't know that song!"

"It doesn't exist! You have to make it up right here on the spot! You have to improvise it!"

"S.O.B." Blast started dancing in a circle and singing, "I am a gorilla, I am, no, I am not! I am a proud pillar of the community of snot! And no one can predict what's in my pocket what's I've got! They only need know who's got and who's got not!"

Bolson said, "That is something truly frigging horrible, man, like I've never heard before."

Callwell and Rager were sitting in the stands laughing.

Blast continued: "Today I ran off with the Mayor's dead wife! Who complained all day long in her bitterness and strife! I love you my dear, yet forget this not, I'll love you only until the day your rot stops!"

"Okay, you can shut up now!" Bolson said. "My stomach is feeling a bit off."

"I can't leave out the Chorus!: Gorillas, gorillas, will always consume, your precious bananas!"

"That's enough, Blast, enough! You're being far beyond stupid!"

"Gorillas will steal and drive all your cars, pretend to be you, abuse your credit cards!"

Bolson attacked Blast, knocking him to the ground. Callwell and Rager were laughing even harder.

In this manner, no one ever wins or loses Black Dodge-ball, but millions pay big bucks to see such a unpredictable match; Black Dodge-ball is far more violent than hockey and sometimes funnier than a really good stand-up comedy routine. A ball sport that deteriorates into all all-out wrestling match where people get tossed through glass windows is always preferable to a true, honorable, coherent, official, athletic sport. For some strange reason Black Dodge-ball Players never get sports cards made from their likenesses, that the kiddies can trade. Their preferred sport looks childish and like so much cheating although it

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really isn't, it is a genuine sport, just the kind of sport for people a bit touched in the head, and I don't mean touched by an angel. It's just not an acceptable sport for sane people. Maybe that's the real reason it hasn't gone wholly commercial? You have to be socially unreliable enough to play the game and maybe even highly disturbed to be really good at it.

Riker's voice interrupted the goings on by blasting itself from the base's main speaker system. "This is Rikers! The base is under attack! Everyone to the Armory, now! You are now officially activated! Congratulations!"

Bolson was so disappointed that he wouldn't be able to throw Blast around the gymnasium for a while that he said, "Aw, chocolate canned crapola!"

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Information In The Armory

In the Armory, Rikers stood in a corner holding a rather large Cannon-Rider, a lethal cannon that only fired one kind of lethal shot intended for obliteration. The cannon also served a secondary service, as a low- and high-riding hover-bike. The barrel in front shot the ball of lethal flame-blast, and the rear spewed out exhaust and enough force to propel the unit forward, and anyone who happened to be sitting on it at the time. Near him were several large open cabinets, which had never been opened, each of which now also displayed cannon-bikes of the same design as he was holding in his hands. Each cabinet door had each of the names of Team Cryopus, and the guys had been highly curious as to what was inside them. They assumed correctly that hidden in the cabinets were weapons but this was unexpected.

"Grab each of you a cannon-bike. Don't ask questions. We've got a Gremmie slicing its way into the base as I speak."

The Team moved quickly to take their weapons and then stood in a circle around Rikers waiting for him to say more.

"This is what we're going to do..." Rikers began but he was interrupted.

"I have a question that needs answering, Project Head!" said Callwell. "Gremmies are not from Cryopus. How did it get here?" said Callwell.

"I said no questions!"

"You have never been forthcoming with us, Rikers, like so many Project Leaders before you," said Rager. "Answer the lady's question or you can face this Gremmie thing all by yourself."

"If we don't work as a Team we all die." Rikers had softened his tone, he was beginning to feel his authority slipping away, if he ever had any authority in regards to this Team.

"Since when have you and us ever been a Team?" asked Bolson. That confirmed it, he had never really had any

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authority. Ever.

"And what about the guy that you have prisoner in the lower levels?" asked Rager. "What about him?"

"Classified," said Rikers, lowering his eyes. "We have no time. The thing has found the elevator entrance. It's only a matter of time before it tears its way through ever door on its way to killing us. Have you ever seen a Gremmie kill a human being? It's quick if the human is lucky and the creature manages to be precise but it's not pretty."

Blast took a deep breath and sighed. "We can all get out of here on the Majestic. It's right there. A lot closer to us than the Gremmie is, but if we stand around here wasting time, that creature will be upon us and tear us each fifty new butt-holes."

There was indeed a large gray vessel nearby at their disposal, the other half of the armory was an underground bay with a giant man-made tunnel leading to the surface and safety.

"From what I hear, Gremmies are impossible to kill," said Callwell. "Their physiology is different from anything man has encountered. It's a mystery to us!"

"The company found a way of killing them," said Rikers.

"How?"

"A man-made gas or spray, the formula of which I am unaware of," Rikers said looking up again. "Looks like one of them got sprayed but didn't die. It just went to sleep and woke up again, pissed off."

"What are you talking about?" asked Bolson. "Be more specific!"

"We gassed the whole Gremmie planet, the entire population, attracting them by way of Gigantic Floating Bullhorns, then sprayed them dead, and brought all the corpses here to Cryopus. Please let's deal with the problem."

"That's just great," said Callwell. "That's what those guys were burying in the cavern, an entire alien species?"

"Yes, of course," said Rikers, "now please, let's..." He could see they still wanted more explanations. There was no other way to get their cooperation with offering up more information. The Soldiers were starving for knowledge. He understood that and decided to give it to them, no matter what consequences would follow. "We needed their world's natural resources," Rikers confessed. The public is being told the Gremmies were re-located to a better world where they would thrive."

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"Who's the prisoner in the basement?" asked Rager.

"An activist, a writer-journalist-type-guy, caused a lot of embarrassment to the company so he was kidnapped. He was against the whole idea of moving the Gremmie population. Well couldn't have him spreading horrible rumors that would jeopardize the whole operation. And, no, I wasn't torturing him, he's just an angry prisoner. He was screaming all on his own. I never touched him."

"Yeah, probably missing his wife and kids, huh?" said Bolson.

"Let's set him free, and then we all get the hell out of here," said Rager.

"You can't," said Rikers. "He's locked in a sealed bomb-cell."

"Holy crap, those things are illegal," said Blast.

"Not for us since we design and build them," Rikers said, "You cannot break him out! If anything goes within twenty feet of that bomb-cell it will automatically explode! Such an explosion will make a crater out of this Base as deep and large as a lake!"

"I've always wondered," said Blast. "How is he being fed? And does he have a rest room?"

"No time to explain in detail," said Rikers, "the answer is yes and yes. He has his own air too."

"But it's all in limited amount," said Bolson. "Isn't it?"

"Yes," said Rager, it's all time-able, a countdown could have been activated, and he would have only had a certain short amount of time left, but we all would have been long gone before his clock ran low on time, and the cell-bomb went off. And no one would have been the wiser."

"I've got an idea," said Rager. "We take the Majestic and we go home. But, you, you slimy little murderous S.O.B., you get to stay here and deal with your angry little friend, the Last Gremmie."

"Can't we try killing it?" asked Callwell.

"You forgot about the Mine-Seal! This planet is running out of time. I will not die for something that's gonna die, that's the doing of the company! I'm not a fucking suicidal moron!"

"Yeah, yeah," said Callwell. "Neither are, right guys?" Bolson and Blast nodded in agreement. Truth was, if Rager had said let's go fight it, they would have obeyed, and even died with him.

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Rikers mounted his cannon-bike and ascended toward the ceiling where he flew in circles around the Armory.

"He's making noise," said Callwell. "He'll lead that thing right to us!"

"Hear me now! Nobody leaves the Base until all the Gremmies are dead!" yelled Rikers. "That's the mission! Now you know what your job is! These are my orders! We will go and kill that thing! Then and only then do we escape off-planet! I am the Project Head Leader! Don't mess with me! I mean it! I can deactivate anything on this Base, and you won't get off at all!"

"Crazy, evil S.O.B.," said Blast.

The Base computer's voice filled the air, and a warning alarm began to sound. "Danger. Prison Level Entrance under attack."

Rikers lowered his cannon-ride to their eye level, "It's too late. It's going straight for the prisoner! You have to get out of here now! This place is gonna blow if I don't do something! Go on, take the Majestic, I'll handle this. You are all good guys."

He turned and flew off down a corridor heading for the prison level entrance.

"Wow. A compliment," said Callwell.

"You heard what the man said," said Rager. "Now that we know what the job really is, let's go home and collect our big fat paychecks. This is not our problem. It's unsolvable anyway. There's a good reason Gremmies don't make good pets, like cats and dogs."

"They tend to eat your couches and pillows whole?" said Callwell. "Imagine the size of the litter box."

They all flew their cannon-bikes up the ship's ramp and into the belly of the ship. The rear hatch closed behind them. They dismounted their bikes and made their way to the cockpit of the vessel and started up her engines. On the surface of the planet, The illusions of simulated rock formations began moving aside to allow the ship to fly through.

At the prison entrance there were two large doors. There were gaping holes in the doors. The Gremmie was doing a good job of punching and slicing through the heavy metal. The creature turned around at the sound of Riker's approaching hover-bike.

"Hey, you, ugly!" Rikers said, slowing the cannon-bike down. "That is not a good idea! Do you understand what I am saying? If you go down there, this whole place goes kaboom!"

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In the cockpit of the Majestic, Bolson was flipping switches. "We forgot about the Kitchen-Bot! Aw, man, he was so cool."

"Too late," Rager was saying in a sad tone. "Too late to go back."

At the prison entrance, the Gremmie and Rikers faced-off. Neither moving towards the other.

"I've got my cannon aimed right at you. I'm gonna press the firing trigger and I'm gonna pop you like a giant, bloody, fat tick, you ugly little bastard! Chase me you rotten little shit."

Rikers turned around and sped down the corridor, where he stopped and waited a while before realizing the Gremmie hadn't followed him. He flew back towards the prison level entrance. The Gremmie was still there standing in front of the doors, panting as if it were out of breath.

"What is wrong with you?" Rikers asked.

The Majestic started to move up the tunnel toward a sunny sky.

Blast sounded sad, "When I woke up this morning I didn't think it would be my last day on the job."

"We didn't know what our job was until it was too late," said Rager.

Bolton said, "We didn't do any work anyway, not really. So I get paid for doing absolutely nothing? I like it when jobs work out this way."

"Why do we this?" asked Callwell. "Over and over, again and again, it's like some awful drug addiction. What were we doing that ever made sense?"

"We were guarding a prisoner," said Rager. "That was the secret mission. We didn't have to know who it was, or why he was there, or that he even existed. No court could judge us for not knowing what our purpose was, at least no court that I know of."

"It doesn't make any sense," Callwell sounded sad. "It never does. When the purpose is kept from you, it's like being in some kind of hellish limbo."

"It not make sense is the point," Rager said. "The prisoner was dead any way you look at it. The cell-bomb would explode eventually, when the time was right. We were there to make sure nobody got inside to rescue him. Rikers couldn't tell us the reasons why were there, the prisoner was being held there illegally, and against his will. And us having knowledge of the cell-bomb, we would know what kind of danger we were in, and it

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would worry us."

Blast chimed in, "They could have told us we were sitting on a stupid bomb. We're Soldiers, it's what we do, we take dangerous chances. They just didn't have to tell us a missing human being was involved. Soldiers like us could use a little information, if not all the information, it helps us keep our sanity."

"The prisoner did not exist anymore," said Rager leaning forward. "No word was supposed to ever get out about his disappearance, let alone the death of the Gremmie species. If Rikers tells them that we know all of this, things are going to change. If they know that we know, they will kill us. The irony? The guys who come, won't know why they're being sent."

"Yeah, yeah," said Bolson, "it's making more and more non-sense to me. The pen goes round and round, the circle is completed, and it looks like a big butt-hole."

At the prison entrance, the Gremmie and Rikers were still staring at one another.

"What are you waiting for?" Rikers said, but he didn't expect the creature to understand the question. He was saying it more for himself, he was only thinking out loud.

The Gremmie lied down, its belly resting on the cold metal floor. This infuriated Rikers even more.

"Come on, let's end this! I helped killed all your people! And I don't even know what important natural resource your planet has to offer! So there! I'm an ignorant genocidal lunatic! And I want to kill you too!"

The Majestic was flying among the clouds, maneuvering in circles above the hidden base. The outer imitation rock-formation was closing, hiding the tunnel that led down to the Armory.

"That Gremmie is the last of its kind," said Callwell. "Be a shame to lose him now that we might be wanted fugitives."

"What are you saying?" asked Rager.

Callwell leaned closer to him, "If we were to capture him. Who knows how much a zoo, or a private entity might pay for him?"

Bolson said, "Before we decide to go back down there, on some money-making hunting expedition, my advice is ... we wait just a few more minutes."

The doors of the prison level entrance opened.

"No! What are you guys doing?" Rikers was yelling at the ceiling.

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The base computer voice spoke, "Mission compromised. Base Destruction Inevitable."

"Give me a chance to fix this!" Rikers was furious now.

"LET ME THE HELL OUT OF HERE!" the prisoner was yelling from below. The Gremmie stood, turned, and looked down the ramp leading down. "DAMN YOU PEOPLE! THIS ISN'T RIGHT! RELEASE ME NOW!"

"Now, you're interested, eh?" said Rikers, revving up the engine of his cannon-bike.

The Gremmie turns around to face him, then turned and looked down into the darkness again.

"Tempted to go down there?" asked Rikers. "Stupid alien. It's a trap."

The Gremmie turns suddenly around in Rikers direction and ran towards him, and took a flying leap at him. Rikers simply tilted his cannon-bike, rotating to the right, and the Gremmie missed stabbing him by mere inches. Yet that really didn't seem to have been all of the Gremmie's plan, he continued running, past the hover-bike and down the corridor, away from the prison level entrance.

"Oh, no, no. You're not getting away that easy." Rikers turned the bike around to face the direction of the fleeing alien. "No. It's not going to be that easy." He leans forward on his hover-bike. "I've got you in my sights..." He fired a burst of fireball gas, the sphere of fire shot down the corridor, striking the Gremmie before he could turn a corner. The creature was hit and thrown into a wall but was otherwise unharmed. It rose to its three legs and stared at him while panting angrily. But something else had happened. "Aw, shit!" Rikers screamed. The cannon-bike had been pushed backwards by the force of the explosion, Rikers head hit the ceiling of the downward ramp and he was thrown from the bike and landed roughly on the floor. The cannon which was out of control but with its hovering abilities smoothly spun around in circles on its way down the ramp to the lower prison level. In no time it would be within twenty feet of the prisoner and his tomb of an extremely lethal bomb-cell. "Aw, man...this blows," said Rikers closing his eyes and waiting for death.

The view through the cockpit shield showed what a cell-bomb did when detonated. The base exploded, not unlike a small, cheap, localized nuclear detonation. Long fingers of large chunks of fiery metal debris spread up and outwards, as if to

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embrace the landscape like a giant hand set to grab it prize and keep it.

Bolson nodded his head. "Told you we should wait."

Rager responded with, "Told you it was unsolvable."

Callwell, sitting at one of the monitoring stations in the cockpit, leaned closer to a scanner-monitor, an unidentified was moving across the screen, zig-zagging as it avoided falling debris.. "Strange," she said. "There's a signal. Something alive is moving erratically down there."

"Silver Meanies?" asked Blast.

"You and your damn Silver Meanies," said Bolson. "Every paranoid fantasy you have involves those stupid Silver Meanies."

"They don't call them Meanies for nothing, you know."

"Why don't you go and join them if you like them so much?"

"Not a good idea," said Blast. "They're too mean for my liking."

Callwell zoomed in closer on the signal until an actual image appeared on her monitor. "No! Ha-ha! It's the Gremmie! He survived the explo! He's moving at top speed across the surface toward the high hills! Boy can he travel, fat little dump that he is!"

"We'll, looks like we're in a different business," Rager said proudly. "Follow that taxi, Callwell. And make it snappy."

"How do we catch him?" she asked.

Rager explained, "We don't have to catch him immediately. All we have to do is find out where he sleeps. The rest we'll figure out later. One thing at a time, okay?"

"This Gremmie could be our way to riches and obscurity in retirement. Hey, I'm hungry. If this hunt-capture stunt doesn't work out, is Gremmie skin easy to slice and cook?"

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There Is A Bug In My Suit

In an abandoned circus on an abandoned pleasure-planet stood an abandoned circus tent. Inside, Rager was looking at a monitor, on which the man without was speaking. His visage was blurred, obscured to hide his secret identity. The meeting had been set up by a man named Brindy Pullman, who dealt with dangerous secrets, underworld criminal mischief, and many other Unif-Soldier related interactions.

"What do you say," asked Rager of Mr. Faceless, his impatience shrinking ever shorter by the minute. Rager had expected the transaction to go a bit more smoothly than this, had in fact, unrealistically, expected it to be an easy-money kind of deal. Walk in poor, walk out rich. But Faceless was delaying making any kind of actual deal, and had already offered up several excuses; this was not only annoying but also made Rager highly suspicious.

"Yes, I see your problem," Mr. Faceless was saying. Rager couldn't see the man's face but could tell he was touching all of his fingertips together and could hear the cracking of knuckles, through all the visual blurring going on the snapping sounds were coming through quite clear, or at least that was the impression - the way Rager was interpreting what he was seeing and hearing. For all he knew, in order to relieve stress, the man on the other side of the communications setup had a sheet of bubble-wrap between his hands and was therapeutically popping the bubbles to deal with his stored-up anxiety. "You are on the run, unfortunately, from your former employers, whose identities you don't really know, hmm, difficult to run from pursuing ghosts, correct? You run because you know some of their secrets, and, you have in your possession the Last Living Gremmie, and, you have a most fantastic story to tell in regards to it, more details of which exist I am sure. But your price, your price, it is too much, it is way too much."

"That's the price. Take it or leave it. Now are you buying

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the animal or not? I'm tired of delays. Give me a straight answer now."

"Hmm. Do not be unreasonable, I'm afraid I'll have to do some research, do you not agree? Mr. Rager? It is understood by the general public that the Gremmie race was happily relocated, that is, moved safely yet secretly, unharmed to an unknown location, and that they are all still very much alive and thriving. But in your alternative story, you have implied they are not all alive, that only one remains, and well, this has to be confirmed, or why would I pay such a high price for the one you say you now own? I cannot pay your price unless it is confirmed. Now how do we confirm your fantastic story?"

"I'll send you the location of the base, and you can see for yourself that the mine is there. Radio-activity-Protected Search-Bots should have no trouble sawing through the vault door and taking a look inside the tunnels and snapping a few moving pictures. That should be enough verification."

"Mr. Rager, I like you, but your abilities in doing business are rather poor and leave much to be desired. First, you have to understand what is of great value and what is not, if you are to continue making such deals as these. You see, the Gremmie, yes, while being an interesting species, is much less valuable than the information you have actually just imparted to me. I will pay you handsomely not only for the ugly little angry alien world destroyer you have in your possession, I would attempt to place him in a safe location for the rest of his destructive little life, yes, fine, but, for the star-map to the world where you say this incident took place, that is what I truly want. Time is of the essence, at this moment I must assume your employers are making plans to go back and finish what they started. Soon there may be no evidence left at all."

"You're willing to pay me worthless information? I don't care about intrigue! I care about the Gremmie and how much it's worth!"

"But it is not worth much, not without the truth confirmed, I am sorry, but it is true, you must give me that much, it is only reasonable. You could try to sell to another party, but who would want an uncontrollable hellion like that anyway? No one has been able to tame them! They have one brain cell that tells them to do only three things: Eat, shit, and kill anything that looks threatening, which is usually turns out to be everything and anything. In the process of delivering such an un-kill-able

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and destructive lethal little farting machine, say, to your worst enemy, it gets loose and destroys the ship that is delivering it! I'm sorry but I once heard an unconfirmed story about one Gremmie that was found sitting in the Captain's chair drinking blood from a hole in the top of the Captain's head through a large metal pipe. It's simply not worth the trouble and a high prices are not justified by unsubstantiated fairy-tales. You have a wonderful and fascinating species there, but, trust me, my friend, when I say no one is going to take him off your hands. A crazy suicidal person, yes, maybe, but such people are highly unreliable in the least. But the other information is far more valuable because it can be used practically for something far more constructive. And since you know how to get to the planet in question, well, I will pay a lot for your services. Are you willing to return to that mine, say with several of my colleagues - who can verify your information and find some answers to certain questions we have?"

"Highly Radioactive, since they installed a Seal on the mine."

"Seals mean nothing to me, Rager!" Mr. Faceless almost yelled. "And they take some time to get up to full strength. And from what you've told me not much time has passed since the initial incident. The danger therefore is minimal."

"There's a leak in the vault door," Rager explained. "Chances of there being an unexpected nuclear explosion is very high. No. We are not going back."

"You are a coward," said Mr. Faceless. "And you dare call yourself a Unif-for-hire? But excuse my remark on your personal character, I am being rude, I humbly apologize. Let us reset and begin anew. Surely you don't think I'm asking you to personally go back into the mine? My men will take care of the inspection with their excellent scanning technology, and skilled Robotic Intruders."

"We're just trying to sell an alien specimen, not start a universal incident. You have the wrong Team."

"Of course. So, how do we make the exchange, for the Star-Map, that is? A rocket will be expensive and take several days to reach me. Wireless communication can be intercepted, of course, encryption can be decrypted. I suggest that you and your Team wait there on Planet Tantalus and I will come to you. I will accept your information personally and I will pay you personally. Is it a deal?"

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"No strike teams."

"I am a businessman, not an assassin."

"Last I heard they were both the same thing."

"It's rude to accuse the person you are doing business with of wanting to kill you."

"I'm keeping the Star-Map. There will be no deal."

"An unfortunate turn of events for you and your men, Rager. What if we were to tell Universal Society that you and your Team of Soldiers are hiding secret information on the whereabouts of the Gremmie species and that you found a way to murder them all in your callousness? I'll let the public's imaginations do the rest! Surely there will be others interested in hearing what you have to say about what evil you have done. No, please don't hang up yet, you fool. I don't mean I'm going to tell the whole universe now, as in today. This is merely a threat meant to give you pause. Deal with me and only me and you won't have to be looking over your shoulder wherever you go. Walk away from me and I will make you regret it. You see, I don't have to hunt you down myself to kill you. The greed and/or anger of others will do that for me. The end result will still be the same, the uncovering of the identities of these evil planet-grabbers, whom you have so foolishly trusted. You see, you yourself, Rager, you do not matter, the Last Gremmie it doesn't matter either, not in the big scheme of things; bringing down these evil bastards is the only thing that matters!"

"And you're not evil?" said Rager. Mr. Faceless paused, not responding to that statement. "Mr. Faceless, you already know who they are, the very same charitable organization that said they were helping to save the Gremmies. What their other plans are, figure that out for your damn self! You're a smart man. "

"I need proof, damn you!" said Mr. Faceless, "Do not hang up on me!"

Rager pulled a long chip from a slot in the side of the view-screen and the image of the face-less man being broadcast from across the universe blinked out. Rager stepped out of the tent and into the daylight, where Callwell was waiting, sitting on her hover-bike, ready to move at a moment's notice. Rager's bike was nearby, he mounted it quickly.

"What happened?" asked Callwell.

"It's a trap. We've been delayed on purpose. Stay keen. Keep on the alert. A strike Team is coming here to try and capture us. We've got to out-run them, get to the Majestic, and

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get off-world fast. Where we go from there I've no idea."

"Assassins?"

"Yes, I think so," said Rager.

"What if they're already here?" she looked down at the ground.

"Don't think the worst," Rager advised.

Blast and Bolson hover-biked to their position in front of the old tent.

"Something went wrong," said Bolson.

"That or something is about to go wrong," said Blast.

"I suspect we're surrounded already. Get ready to flee. Hear that rumbling? White Torpedoes are here! Let's move! Now! Keep your ear-sets active in case we get separated!"

The four riding their cannon-bikes took off through the abandoned buildings and worn-down tents of the crumbling dead circus, and flew over the turnstiles into the Amusement Park Area, where they zig-zagged between large obstacles like Ferris Wheels, Haunted Houses, Houses of Mirrors, and countless types of roller-coaster rides.

White Square-Soldiers riding white bikes begin popping out of the ground in front of them. They turned around and headed in the direction they had come from, which was not necessarily the correct path to the Majestic.

"There are too many, we won't be able to lose them easily," said Rager. "Do not lead them to the Majestic. Let's get to the nearest city and try to lose them there. The Whites will back off and won't enter the city proper. They are too well hated."

"Yeah, little old ladies would take shots at them," said Callwell.

"That is correct," said Rager. "The only way to the nearest colony is across the desert. The town is called Breadville, don't ask why, I don't know. They want to capture us, not kill us. But once they have the information they want, and they don't need us anymore, there no telling what they'll do to us."

"My bike has a hiccup," said Callwell. "No idea what it is. But it's doesn't seem too serious. There are at least fifty of them behind us."

They flew out onto desert terrain, maneuvering past alien cacti, abandoned shacks, and natural rock formations. More White Torpedoes popped out of the ground to the left and to the right of them!

"Blast said, "Looks like we're surrounded. Putting up a

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fight might be better than anything they have planned for us inside of a prison cell!"

Rager chimed in, "I agree. Putting up a fight might be the last stupid, but, the best thing we ever do! It would certainly be the last!"

"Bolson here. There's a bug in my suit, sir."

"A bug? How did a bug get in your suit?"

"I feel something too, sir," said Callwell. "Ah, it's moving!"

"Aren't these Suits supposed to give us warnings about insects? I hope it's not poisonous! Whoa, it's in my butt-crack!"

"Sir, I've been stung!" said Callwell.

"Ah," yelled Blast. "Something stung me too!"

"These Suits are supposed to notify us of any dangerous insectoids, unless," Rager paused, trying to figure something out, "the Suits defenses have somehow been deactivated. How the hell did the Meanies plant these insectoids? Ah, crap. I'm bit! Something stung me! I'm bit!"

Callwell's bike slowed down and she was gradually sliding over the left side and onto the desert ground. "We get it," she was saying sleepily to no one specific. "The Suits are not going to be up to standard." Her voice was sounding very sleepy. "We're going to have to find... a fixer." Then she lay on the ground unconscious.

Bolson's hover-bike slowed and came to a full stop. He leaned toward his wind-shield and studied Callwell as they lay on the ground, asleep, possibly dead. "Let's get out of this sticky mess first." But he fell unconscious as well, and fell out of his seat to the sand.

Blast's hover-bike stopped, he sat there for a second trying to adjust his eyesight. The desert was becoming one big blur. "Or we could just surrender," he finally said before falling over onto a desert bush.

Rager stopped his hover-bike. He got off the bike and stood next to it swaying like a drunkard. One hand trying to keep him steady, he said, "Something is wrong! Hear that rumbling sound?"

Whites bikes surrounded the Team in a dead-end-circle and ten enormous White-Torpedo-Ships descended from the sky and blocked the wide desert horizon, hovering over the captured Indy-Unifs.

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If Walls Had Ears

The company meeting hall was dark. The only lights that illuminated anything were the meager little lamps that shed illumination on the papers that rested on the long round table the twenty men were sitting around. They all knew each other's identities, there were very few secrets here. A door opened and a tall slender man entered the hall. He moved to a podium and rested some papers there, notes he had made in case he could not remember certain details of the speech he was about to make.

"I am present at this meeting for the sole purpose of disseminating vital information and to give my honest opinion on the event that has recently transpired which could prove to become the unexpected and undesired downfall of this company.

"For the record, my name is Dr. Arlington H. Millstone, I am a scientist in the employ of this organization and you all know me well. Gentlemen, the oddest thing has occurred. Our spies within the White Torpedo Crime Syndicate have informed us of the capture of the Indy-Team we sent to Cryopus to unknowingly oversee the entombment of the deceased Gremmie Species. Our enemies must not uncover our true identities. Our Charitable Front Organization has been exposed and is being disintegrated. Papers dissolving the company and offers of selling all its assets to any interested parties at very cheap prices are now in the works.

"Granted, this small Indy-Team doesn't know all of the details of the Gremmie operation, but they know enough to point a finger at the location of planet in question, and they may be the cause of others finding clues as to our identities, if such a thing is possible. An investigation of Cryopus may compromise everything. We cannot take any chances that something was accidentally left behind that would lead them to us. I am asking for your permission to OBLITERATE the Planet Cryopus, that is blow it to a trillion pieces, so as to destroy any and all evidence forever! This would beyond the shadow of a doubt throw

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the Quad-Solar-System into disarray. If you recall what occurred when the earth's moon was destroyed, how the earth could not survive without it? The same thing can happen in this scenario. And there's no telling what affect the disappearance of Planet Cryopus will have on the surrounding three planets, and also its sun. And what of the other solar systems nearby? Having seen this sort of thing happen in the past, we all know understand not to make this kind of call without careful study and knowledge of all the possible consequences. It is, of course, impossible to predict all the consequences regarding such a cosmic event. To protect ourselves from our enemies I believe we must stoop to extreme measures. The destruction of Cryopus, would create an empty void the other three planets will not be able to fill, since they are all relying on each other for orbital stability. According to my calculations the other three planets in that System, Beyos, Turbit, and Seltzin, might spin around their sun uncontrollably, their speed increasing, gradually moving away from it, at increasing speeds, eventually leaving that star's influence and shooting out into space, becoming quite dangerous heavenly asteroids that can affect the magnetic fields of other worlds in the nearby vicinity, if they don't explode that is. We would then have to deal with millions of smaller meteors flying about, which are even more unpredictable, and perhaps even more hazardous depending on how close they get to other, inhabited worlds. I think destroying Cryopus is not enough, the entire Quad-System, that is all four planets and their sun, should all of them simply go kapoof! Go away. Disappear! We need to get rid of the whole problem from the start and to hell with any of the consequences! We'll just hope by some insane, yes, I use the word insane, what other word is there to describe this kind of plan? We'll hope by an insane measure of blind-chance that nothing else will go wrong. I've no idea how the sudden disappearance of four orbiting planets and their sun will affect the solar systems in question. But we can put something there as a cosmic-cork to replace the missing planets. We should send in Black-Hole-Detonators with the ability to convert the Quad-System into one giant black nothing, which would be ideal, I am guessing, since they mostly sit around and do nothing that I know of except slowly swallow-up the universe at the speed and rate of which a hospitalized moron drinks his apricot juice from a plastic straw. By the time the Black Hole becomes too dangerous, we will have moved on to other

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planets far away from any danger. We've done it before. We can't afford to send-in super nova-bombs, and watch it go kaboom, simply because we want to see a pretty display of fireworks. We can also simultaneously get rid of our White-Torpedo problem. We have an opportunity here that should not be missed. I think the only solution is a total destruction of their entire Armada of space-ships, which is at this moment gathering in the Quad-System itself. They are headed for Planet Cryopus and will make an attempt to investigate the mine where the Gremmie corpses are stored. No doubt they want to expose us and brand us all criminals in the public's mind. Arrests will surely follow as well as long, hard-imprisonment. The confiscation of all our goods, properties and well-meaning services, notwithstanding. Our hitherto reliable Indy-Team has most likely given them the correct classified information they need to accomplish all of this, most likely under cruel and severe torture was this information extracted. We must send Black-Hole-Missiles now, gentlemen, or we can kiss our asses goodbye, as well all else we hold dear, which includes my rare and complete, collected recordings of soft rock 'n' roll ballads."

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A Rare Case of Black Dodge-ball Celebrity Mania

Inside a White Torpedo vessel, Rager was playing Black Dodge-ball against a White Torpedo Leader. They both faced the large ball in the ball-court.

"S.O.B.," Rager mumbled, because he was losing. His opponent was offering only one prize, while Rager was forced to offer up different little tid-bits information every time he lost, which was often. If Rager ever caught a single black ball, he and his Team would go free, be given a small shuttle and allowed to escape into space! But that was too good to be true, so Rager just found himself stalling for time. Truth was Rager didn't trust the White-Torpedo Leader at all, and even if a ship was given to him and his Team, what were the chances the Whites simply would not blow them to smithereens when trying to make their getaway? As much as Rager wanted to win, he couldn't bring himself to do his personal-best at the playing of his favorite game.

The other three members of his Team sat in the nearby stands, along with many other cheering White Torpedoes in their Square-White-Unifs.

"He's good, Rager," Blast was saying.

"He's a cheater!" yelled Rager, angrily.

"You're not helping!" Rager yelled back.

"On to the game!" said the White Leader. "One more loss, one more of your secrets must be revealed!"

"Stop saying that!" said Rager really frustrated now. "I know the stupid rules! I practically wrote them! I, and my brother Arbor invented this dumb sport! If I win this time, you grant us our freedom, right?"

"I call the final of my three allotted handicaps! You play

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standing on one leg!"

"S.O.B., I knew one day that rule was gonna come back and bite me on the butt!"

"That's what you get for being creative!" Callwell was yelling now, having the time of her life.

Another White Torpedo Soldier walked up to the Leader and pulled him aside.

"What is it?" asked the Leader.

"We're in danger. Planet many planet destroying missiles are heading our way."

"Get the armada out of here. Do we even stand a chance of getting far enough away?"

"I don't know, sir." The Second in Command turned and left the gym, leaving the Leader to stand there silently for a moment.

"I'm afraid our little game will have to be postponed, until we move our vessels out of this system," said the Leader. "Destruction is coming and we must make our escape, or we will be destroyed along with the entire Quad System. Your bosses are desperate to keep their identities a secret. It looks like we may not survive the coming event."

"Hey, we never met those guys. We were hired by a guy called Rikers."

"A secret you should have left for a game of The Black Ball, no?" His voice sounded almost cheerful, and well, maybe he was happy, these might be the very last minutes of his life. Maybe he was more happy now than he had ever been in his entire life, what with playing the black ball with one of the creators of the sport. Rager never let on who he was in front of his people, and if they ever suspected he was one of the Ragers that actually invented the game, they kept it to themselves and never ever asked him about it. Now that the truth was out, it didn't matter, something heavy-duty was going to happen, and it was best they focus on that.

"Crap!" said Rager. "I knew coming back here would spell our doom."

"Way to go, expert." Callwell was shaking her head in disapproval. "Where's our escape shuttle? You said you could beat anybody at this game. You invented it, you lard-ass!"

"Shut up!" said Rager. He looked at one of the White-Unifs that stayed behind as their Guards. There were three White-Guards. "What happens to us now?"

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"You really don't have anything else he needs to know, I think." The Guard laughed. "You will be under guard here in this court until the danger, whatever it is, is over, then I think they will execute you."

The ceiling lights suddenly went out.

Callwell had an idea, "The lights are out. This could be our only chance to escape."

"To where?" asked Rager. "Looks like things are heating up to super-hot. Let's wait and see if we're still alive after this battle is over, if that's what it is."

Bolson chimed in, "I think they're reserving energy to make a quick acceleration into a battle-zone. They're getting out of the Quad System and fast. My theory? They're going to do heavy battle in another system, or, Planetary Destructo-Missiles are heading this way. Such things have been known to happen."

Bolson said, "Space-and-time and holy-bologna!"

"Where-ever did you get that saying?" asked Callwell. Bolson did not respond with an answer.

"You made it up yourself, didn't you?" said Callwell. "You're such a child."

Rager leaned closer, "Yeah, our best bet is to stay put until we're free of any danger. When that Leader returns to the court I'll be more than happy to see him again. But let's start planning our escape anyway."

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Cattle Prods Versus Alien Probes

There's a mind-occupation-game people stationed at monitors play in their heads to keep from being bored: When in heavy battle what would you prefer as a weapon if you only had one of two choices, a cattle prod or an alien anal probe? This mind-puzzle usually keeps one's imagination well-fed until something far more interesting materializes. Looking into deep space via telescopic lenses and seeing several hundred doomsday missiles approaching rapidly is enough to rip a monitor-observer out of his reverie. In fact it's enough to make a Soldier change his religion! Or vomit on the inside of his Square-Helmet right there and then, the soldier suddenly understanding in his deepest gut there's might be no way out of such an ugly mess unless you could think very fast and come up with a brilliant, even close-to-genius solution, that could save the whole White Torpedo Armada! But the guy who had just thrown up in his helmet was not a quick thinker, and was therefore quickly replaced with another Soldier who when he also realized what was coming preferred not to vomit, but simply switched from one religion to another because the previous one didn't seem to be working. Said Replacement-Unif was a bit more reliable about keeping the contents of his stomach where they were supposed to be, regardless of his tendency to switch from one religion to another on several occasions - testing out the potency of each as he went along. You just never knew who a vomiter would turn out to be until some truly unhealthy dangerous situation began. When it comes right down to it, anyone was susceptible to intense kinds of fear. Every Soldier was put through varying kinds of stress-tests and screening-processes, so much so, that they usually weeded out the weak ones. But there's no telling how people will change over time, and Square-Unif-Outfits were known to change people drastically. They are restrictive at first, but then you get used to them, then quite dependent on them, then you refuse to remove them altogether, and it's

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anybody's guess what kind of psycho-abnormalities will emerge from years of Square-Suit-Abuse.

The lights came back on in the gymnasium.

"Ah, light!" said Callwell. "Much better to see our enemies with."

In the ball-court area, three armed White-Torpedo Guards were watching over Bolson, Callwell, Blast, and Rager, who were seated in the stands.

"How do you guys pop-up out of the sand like that?" asked Blast, trying to distract their Guards with conversation, so Rager and Callwell could converse a bit more secretly.

"Classified technology," said one of the White Guards. "So it's none of your damn business."

Another Guard chimed in, "They're going to kill you when the danger is over. Heh-heh."

Blast wanted to punch that guy in his flat face, but held himself. "You think it's funny?"

"Yeah," said another Guard. " and we're going to watch and place bets."

Bolson was curious, "Bet exactly on what?"

A Guard leaned closer, placing a leg on a seat. "How many gunshots it takes to penetrate your Color-Suits. Not all Unif-Suits are equal, if you know anything about Square-Suits. There's a big difference between shooting someone in the front as opposed to shooting someone in the back."

"And the difference is," asked Bolson.

"When they shoot you in the back, less of a chance you see it coming!"

The White Soldiers thought this was a great joke and they laughed. Bolson assume they played this joke on all their Square-Uniformed prisoners.

"These guys are hilarious," said Blast. "Hey, where's our little round alien friend? What did you guys do with him?"

"Shut up," some Unifs became infuriated when others felt they had a right to receive information. "That information is not available to you." Unifs of course weren't told much, so it only angered them when people asked them questions the answers to which were not available to them either.

Bolson thought he'd play with their minds as well since a game of let's-play-with-people's-heads had been initiated. The trouble with this game was that some people forget it was all supposed to be a playful game of wits, and turn such situations

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into an opportunity for extreme violence when they run out of clever things to say, "We'll all going to die, you know."

"No we're not," said a Guard.

"How do you know?" asked Blast. "I heard there's an entire Fleet of Invisible Dictators coming our way."

"That's not true," said another Guard. "What's an invisible Dictator?"

"Do you have a wife?" asked Bolson. "Some woman you love, dearly? You might never see her again."

"Stop asking questions!" said a Guard. "Shut up! I'm warning you!"

"We can't even make small talk?" said Blast. "That's really impolite!"

"Stop distracting us," said another Guard, "we know you're trying to escape."

That statement got the attention of all four of the Indy-Unifs. Rager and Callwell, suddenly stopped talking to focus on the conversation going on next to them.

"Oh yes?" said Rager. "Please explain to us our great plan of escape, cause I don't see how we're supposed to pull something like that off."

"I don't see it how its possible either," said Bolson.

"Yeah, enlighten us," said Blast.

"You're trying to make us angry so we attack you, then you overpower us, take our weapons and escape."

Blast turned to Bolson and said, "Is that what you were thinking? Why didn't you tell me?"

"No," said Bolson. "I don't think that was what I was thinking, or I might have shared that with you. I'm a little confused. Was that really our plan? Did our only plan just get foiled, or am I missing something?"

"You can't pull the wool over our eyes!" said a Guard.

"Pulling the wool," said Rager. "That expression is not familiar to me. Is that the same as pulling on somebody's leg, I don't understand."

"Wise-ass!" said a Guard. "Silence now. No more talking."

A Fourth White Torpedo Guard entered the ball-court and all four of the White Guards huddled together to discuss something that appeared to be very important. They had obviously switched on their ear-sets from Public Mode to Private Mode, and were conversing with each other using some secret frequency. Then three Guards turned and walked off, while one stood there waving

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at the Independent Color-Unifs sitting prisoner in the athletic stands.

"You're on your own," the Guard said. "Goodbye. This ship is being abandoned. Gotta go now."

And they were gone, much to the Team's confusion.

"What the hell just happened?" asked Callwell.

"You hear that distant swooshing sound?" asked Bolson.

"Listen, that's the sound of hundreds of Escape Pods being jettisoned."

"Something is wrong," said Rager. "And we're the last to know, or we'll never get the answers at all, and that worries me! Let's move!"

They stood up and ran for the gymnasium entrance.

"Where to?" asked Callwell.

"Prisoner level, wherever that is," said Rager.

"What for?" asked Blast.

"To get our Gremmie back."

"Oh," said Bolson. "Is that really necessary. Isn't escape more important?"

"So is our future as entrepreneurs," said Rager. "We're not Soldiers anymore we're businessmen."

"Okay, if you say so," said Callwell. "You're the boss."

In a corridor they stopped by a white plastic level map with red lettering which was glued to a wall. Blast studied it carefully looking for answers. "You are here. There's a little red arrow pointing to this spot we're standing on. Crap, this is just a standard physical map of one small sector! Where the heck is the rest? Where's the electronic version of the whole ship? Those cheap bastards!"

"I hear some screaming!" said Bolson said, "It looks like trouble is heading our way!"

Several White Guards were running towards them, their square white uniforms covered in blood. The Gremmie was chasing them, his sharp paws stabbing them from behind in an attempt to kill anyone that was in his path.

"This is not good," Bolson was saying, not realizing his friends had already started running and he was going to be left behind if he didn't do the same. "How did he get out of his cage?"

Rager was almost laughing now, "He's such a slimy little bastard! He's probably the cause of all this panic! Why this ship is being abandoned! I love him!"

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"And here I am thinking you loved me," said Callwell.

"You'll always be number two, babe," said Rager.

"I always had a feeling taking him hostage was a bad idea," said Bolson.

Callwell said, "Still, your trap was a great idea. Quite ingenious."

"Well, he is a monster," said Bolson. "What else do you use as bait but human meat? There were plenty of dead bodies lying about as you remember."

"Only you would have come up with the idea of cage made of human bones! That was brilliant! He was downright confused and with good reason I would guess!"

"I think he just felt all good and cozy in his macabre new home," said Blast.

Bolson brought them all back to their current situation, "Well, Looks like the grand confusion has wore off. He's gonna try and kill us again!"

"Look!" yelled Callwell, pointing at a sign: "Experimental Prototypes Space Craft Division." An arrow pointed one of four corridor of the intersection they were standing in.

Rager said, "That sounds okay to me, since we ain't got anything better to do!"

The large doors to EPSCD were open. They rushed inside the Tech-Lab and witnessed the sight of five space-ships of strange design. Four looked space-worthy, if they were operable at all, the last looked stripped of parts.

"Hey, how do we choose?" asked Bolson. "I've never seen anything like these before!"

Blast was jabbing his appendages in the air at the ships. "Eenie-meanie-myknee-moe!"

"Cut the crap and stop wasting time" commanded Rager. "There are four ships, one for each of us. Everyone take a ship and start them up. Whatever works, that's the one we take."

They all ran up ramps of their respective ships going straight for the cockpits, to sit down in pilot's chairs.

"How do I start this thing?" asked Callwell. "Guys, this is not working! I'm pressing what appear to be engine activation buttons and nothing is happening! I don't think my ship is space-worthy!"

Bolson's cockpit lit up like glorified fireworks then fizzled and died with the sounds of like animals dying horrible deaths, "Guys, " he said, "it started fine then it turned itself

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off. I'm not getting any reaction here. I think my ship is dead."

Blast said, "My ship is dead too, but I do have a working monitor here with a good view of the White Torpedo Armada, and it looks like the Whole Fleet is moving away from us. Isn't that interesting..."

"Scratch that, Blast," said Rager. "Wrong conclusion. My monitors are working too! I have here a readout of the Armada's position in relation to ours in relation to some really big black dot. What the hell is that? They're not pulling away from us, we're being pulled away from them by some unknown force! Dammit, my ship is crap too! Everybody outside! We all have to talk!"

They all exited their ships and stood gazing at the last vessel which is a total wreck, missing vital parts of its hull, exposed wires protruded from holes where once were metal plates which were now carelessly dropped here and there on the floor.

"Just great," said Callwell, "What now?"

Then, enter the Gremmie!

"We have company!" yelled Blast.

The Gremmie had heard his voice and and angrily running towards them. They started to climb the stripped ship as if it were a monkey-bar playground. The Gremmie studied them from below, it walked around the derelict ship looking for a way to climb. It poked at the metal hull to test its strength. The tap-tap-tapping was somehow worse to Callwell than the idea of being killed by that thing. "Anybody got any bright ideas?" she said, but no one was answering her question.

Then the ships computer message system came on, "Danger! Gravity Failing! Black Hole is sucking in the entire vessel. No chance whatsoever of acceleration and departure."

"Did I just hear right?" asked Blast.

Rager said, "I heard the word Black Hole. How the hell did we get ever near a Black Hole?! There's no Black Hole in the Quad-Solar-System!"

"Well I think there is now," said Blast.

"Oh, could things get any worse?" said Callwell.

"I love you, Callwell," said Bolson. "I always have."

"Yeah," said Callwell, "things just got frigging worse!"

The ceiling lights begin to dim slightly. Then the ship's auto-gravity failed and everyone, the Gremmie included, started floating towards the high ceiling.

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Blast thought he'd say a few last words, "Goodbye, everyone, it was nice knowing you. Let's hope there's a heaven, let's really hope there's no hell."

"What is that supposed to mean?" asked Bolson.

"See you on the other side," replied Blast. "That's what it means."

Callwell was sounding depressed, "Nothing can survive a Black Hole, not even a Gremmie. Poor little guy. I was really starting to like him too. Look at him, floating there, all innocent-like. He's only doing what his nature tells him to do. So what if its kill-kill-kill? He's still has such an innocent heart."

Bolson chimed in, "You want to marry him? I can have it arranged."

Rager said, "Listen, guys, I don't want to be super-swirled like a milk-shake, or popped like a water-balloon, or even shredded like... eww, it makes me shudder to even think of it! Let's all just make our way to that Gremmie there and let it put a quick end to our misery."

The Team began flailing their arms, swimming in the air, kicking off from objects that were floating nearby. They were getting closer and closer to the Gremmie, who also started to swim, but away from them, they're approach having been a bit way too creepy for him.

"You coward," said Blast. "When we finally need you, you chicken out!"

Colorful lights played on the walls - the source of which could not be determined. Cracks began to appear, large and small rips in anything that was made of metal. Bumps appeared like huge fever blisters which began to either burst molten metal like quickly squeezed zits spitting out their contents, or they melted like a wad of fruit-jam tossed at a wall, a glob of red, hot metal sliding downwards.

"So this is how it ends," said Bolson. "It's won't be so bad - if it's not painful."

"Be quiet," said Rager. "I see a beautiful pristine beach, soft waves hitting the shore like sweet music, and swaying trees with hammocks to lie down in. And waiters carrying drinks with tiny umbrellas in them. And look! A ball-court! And an eternal game of Black Dodge-ball is going on! Holy smoke, I see my brother, Arbor! Hey, bro, how's it hanging?"

"He's hallucinating," said Callwell.

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Rager just kept going on and on about his wonderful visions.

Callwell shook her head in sadness. "The Black Hole is affecting his mind. He's lost."

"It's all so beautiful," said Rager. "Everything is so glorious. Dying is so peaceful and fantastic."

"Yeah, he's lost it all right," said Bolson. "Maybe it's better this way. When the end comes, he'll die happy."

Callwell suddenly yelled out, "Mom, what the heck are you doing here? Did you get my last check? What do you mean you couldn't cash it?"

"Oh, crap," said Blast. "Now she's gone too!"

"Hey," said Bolson, "there's another ship. There's a way out of this crazy mess."

"What are you talking about," asked Blast. "Are you seeing things too?"

"No," said Bolson. "Look, see, there's that crack in the wall that just opened up over there. There another ship, I'm telling you, just take a look."

Blast looked in the direction Bolson was pointing, "I don't see any crack, Bolson, I'm sorry. I really do wish there was a ship there, but it just ain't going to happen."

"It's right there! I can see it! Tell the others!"

"Good for you, Bolson," said Blast feeling more solitary than ever. "Bolson is gone too. Now it's just me. I'm all alone."

The Gremmie came from behind and stabbed Blast through the chest with one of his sharp pointers.

"Ah, crap!" Blast said. "That really hurts! Wait, the pain is going away! Ahh, it's gone now! That's weird! Was that a hallucination? Am I dead? Am I hurt or am I not hurt?"

The Gremmie used his three appendages to embrace Blast's Square-body. It opened its mouth to engulf Blast's head, and started gnawing on it.

"Oh, no, no!" Blast was too tired and weary to yell or fight back. "Don't do that! That's disgusting! Have you no manners? You dumb alien!"

Then the Gremmie was gone, and Blast missed its company.

"Come back... You can can come back and gnaw on my skull for a while if that's what makes you happy... Ahhh... It's so peaceful now... It's like floating in water... And I'm so sleepy... I think I'll take a long nap... Some moron is

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responsible for all that stupid craziness... When I wake up I'm kicked him right in the nuts."

And then there was nothing but a soft breeze moving through the darkness, a flickering shadow on a black that made no sound, a long gray dream without any feelings...

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I Am Not Afraid Of Not Knowing Everything

A bright, harsh sun, and a cold desert wasteland, was the next item on the menu.

"Where are they?" Callwell was asking of Blast. They were both climbing up the sandy hillside of a cold desert terrain, having become separated from the others during a freezing cold night. Their Unif-Suits had kept them warm enough, but as insatiable human curiosity goes, and men's stubbornness is unfailingly persistent, the other two had disappeared during the sleep-time.

Blast said, "Over this hill. I followed their footprints and I saw Bolson was just sitting there not saying a word. So I went back to wake you up. Well, let's hope he's still there."

The two reached the top of the hill and sitting alone, gazing off into the distance, was Bolson, just as Blast had previously described.

Callwell ran up to the Soldier. "Where the hell is Rager?"

Bolson spoke in a soft monotone voice, as if he were uncaring of the disappearance of one of their members, or had resigned himself to some kind of fate that only he was aware of. "He went to inspect it. He disappeared into one of its worn-out holes."

"That crazy useless man," Callwell was angry now. Rager could be dead for all she knew. It was never safe to go into an unexplored area alone. Their Great Leader too often only thought of himself, and his rashness could get them all killed.

"I told him I saw the Gremmie," said Bolson. "I told him the Gremmie and I looked at each other face-to-face for along time. And then the monster ran away and it went inside one of the holes, so Rager went to go see what was so interesting to the animal."

Blast was outraged, "Aw, you gotta be kidding me! That monster made it through the Black Hole?"

"Yeah," said Bolson, "but, he's all calmed down and not

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really wanting to kill anyone. I think he likes it here. He's happy. And if the Gremmie is happy, all is right with the new world."

"What new world, you idiot?" said Callwell. "We don't even know where we are or what it's called!"

"Okay," said Bolson, "the new universe then."

"What universe?" asked Blast. "Look up, the sky is white and the stars are all black! It's all reversed!"

"What a trivial observation," said Bolson. "Yet, I don't have any answers. But, I am not afraid of not knowing everything! I just know not one of us can explain that!" He was pointing towards the distance now. They both knew what he was talking about, they just didn't want to believe that the object in question existed."

"If it stinks, there's a definite explanation for it." Callwell was just trying to be funny now, to make them laugh, but it wasn't working.

"I don't think it stinks," said Bolson. "I've been standing here all morning, if morning is what you call this, and the breeze has been blowing in my direction the whole time, and there's been no stench in the air."

"Or, the smell is long gone," said Blast, "depending on how much time it's been sitting there."

Bolson said, "Yeah, but, who does it belong to? It's one of the great secrets of this new universe, I think."

"Fine," said Callwell. "We'll start a tour and charge people to see this great stupid wonder. Let's go and find Rager and that crazy Gremmie, and see if either of them found something to eat!"

"What if the Gremmie ate Rager?" asked Bolson.

Callwell didn't even want to consider that right now, so she said nothing.

"I wonder," said Bolson. "Can we eat it? There's plenty of it."

"I don't know," Callwell said, and started down the hill. The other two followed after her. "And right now I really doubt its edible."

In the distance there was a huge leather shoe, its laces hanging down like giant tree vines; it was partially buried under the sand, had holes in various locations, and was about the size of a mountain!

Blast couldn't help but comment, saying the first things

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that popped into his head, "I'm thinking the same I thought yesterday: who lost that shoe? Somebody out there is walking around almost barefoot. And this is not good for us, because he might be really pissed off and not in the mood to receive visitors!"

THE END

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An Afterword

I did my best to keep this book from having too many typos, I may not have succeeded. Furthermore... I was going to say something important, but I completely forget what it was. Hmm. I guess it wasn't really that important...Ah, I remember, er, now I forget again...

I didn't expect this project to turn out to be this huge a serial-concept. It began as the first comic book entitled, "The Big Questions". It was decided soon after the first comic was completed and released that there should be other comics that would explain the chaotic nature of the that world. Several scripts were written - fast and furious, that is, rather quickly, so that I was overwhelmed with new materials (yet again). As a test - I started adapting the first script to story-form, eventually convinced that the story-format was a good enough way to release all of the material at once, let alone the fact that I didn't really want to create four or five more comic books, a task I wasn't looking forward to, since that's just way too much frigging work. They would have been beautifully experimental as I see them in my mind's eye, but, I just couldn't go through with it once I understood the epic nature of what they should be.

There's so much else besides this that I may still have the energy to do, and I have to choose my battles carefully.

I'm releasing the video short, "The Gremmie Home World", where you can see the creature in its home-world watery environment, and there's something in the video too, a little character I call the Little Whale; the video is an updated version of an old render test created using Blender 3D, MPEG StreamClip, and Final Cut Studio. Certain ideas from this short became descriptive parts of Episode-2's narrative. The test will not be released, not that anyone gives a hoot.

Give a listen to the tie-in music album called, "The Fascination (Parts 1, 2, and 3)". Take a magnifying glass to The

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Fascination Cover-Art. Don't ask questions, you'll get no information here!

It is sad that I was unable to complete the Sequel/Finale as a comic book series. I am however glad that the new series is available for anyone to read as an adapted story. This book was enough hard work to get through. I am tempted to do an audio-book-style reading of this work, but that may not happen, as is the case with a possible Chaos Music Video.

I would have loved to have called this work a novel, but technically it's not long enough. It's not technically a novella either, but then I dislike the term novella anyway, it reminds me of things like baby food, and I don't exactly understand why.

So the term "Story" seems to be the best way to describe this work, even though it is really a novelization/adaptation of several comic-scripts. "Episode 2: Leaving Reality" is a sequel as well as a definitive conclusion. But this may not be the last we see of Indy-Team. I like this universe, and may one day want to visit there again, a few more times, for some unrelated adventures. We'll see. No guarantees though. I can only give others (Microsoft/Minecraft in this case) so much free publicity before I say enough is enough and put an end to whatever. It is mere coincidence that MC will be released with Win10. My playing around with ideas based on that universe is, shall I say, like a rock thrown into the dark - if anyone gets hit - he was simply unlucky...

I am not a frequent user of Online Minecraft worlds and software. I once had an account, long ago. I also visited a site or two, I don't exactly recall. But I had other things to do I felt were more important to do. I haven't returned there in years so that account may have been deactivated. I have no desire to go back.

This work is not authorized in any way by anyone associated with Minecraft, Microsoft, or Mojang, let's get this straight now and forever. It is the sole product of my imagination and to my knowledge bears little or no resemblance to the works of any other human persons, or L.I.S.P.-programmed robots. It is not for sale and should be available as a free download.

There are some influences I think should be addressed, and some credit given where credit is due. I've mentioned several of these in before previous works, so bear with me. If anyone has been left out, my sincere apologies...

(This work has its roots in The Whizperz Saga, the Chaos-

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Indy-Team are toy-versions of Team Whizperz in terms of mood, resemblances to phraseology/terminology, especially from the short stories, and subject matter such as company greed and murderous evil, betrayals, friendships, and much more)

Thanks to Mojang_DB for his models. Without them none of this non-sense would have ever gotten started. Seeds planted long ago grew-up to become the much weirded-out head-scratchings this all is. Forgive my strange grammar. Thanks DB, for opening a simple door.

John Boorman's "Zardoz" for the mysterious flying head. Always beware of men who hide behind curtains. "Red Vs. Blue," for showing how machinima should and can be done right. "The Aliens Franchise", for obvious reasons. "Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy," for not so obvious reasons.

Hardware used in anything connected to this series: IMacG5, MacOSX, Dell, Compaq, Toshiba, MS-Windows 2000/XP/Vista, Gimp, Photoshop, iTunes, Quicktime, Apache Open Office, MPEG-Streamclip, Audacity, and VideoLAN.

The Aliens Colonial Marines Strategy Guide, The Big Book of Minecraft, and Minecraft for Dummies.

Concerning the first comic book, I was truly not endorsing Nike sneakers, I was just too damn lazy to erase the logo.

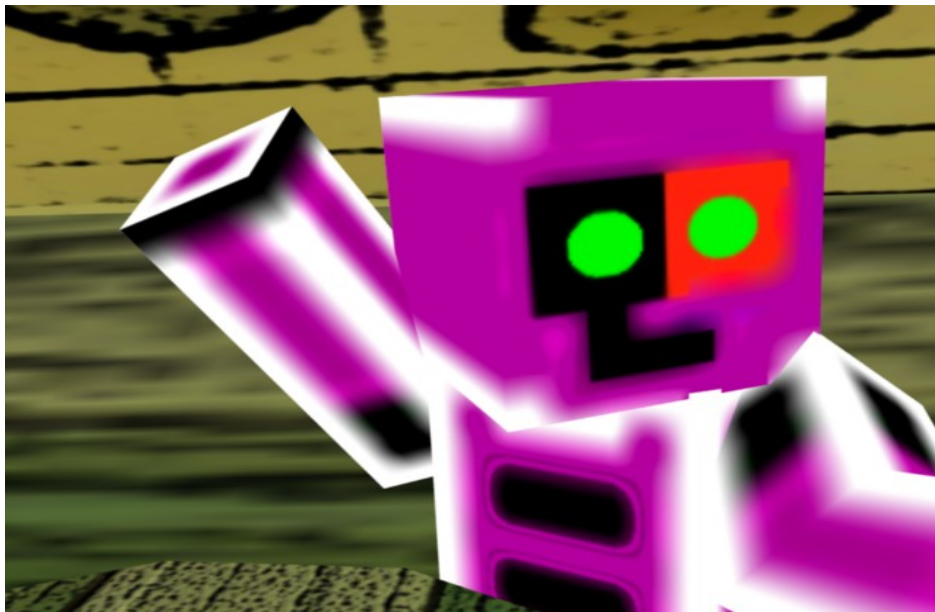
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Understand that I reserve the right to answer or not to answer
any correspondence whatsoever.

The Author
August, 2015



"Ah, shut up, time-of-the-month!"

"Who the hell do you think you're talking to?
You think I'm fascinating? How about this fist?
Do you think this fist is fascinating?
I'll knock your block off, tumbleweed!"